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ABSTRACT

The model for student assessment and placement described in this report was developed by the Learning Assessment Retention Consortium (LARC), a year-old network of 17 northern California colleges organized to examine problems related to assessment and to implement specific action plans. The report begins by citing statistics on the increasing numbers of underprepared students in community colleges to explain the growing importance of assessment and placement services in college planning. After providing information on the establishment of LARC and a sample of its activities (e.g., faculty workshops, research efforts, and publication programs), the report identifies strategic questions for college planning; looks at the objectives of assessment according to the LARC model; identifies assessment, advisement, placement, and follow-up as the four components in LARC's comprehensive system; and discusses their interrelationships. Next, various types of assessment/placement systems are briefly described and the guidelines established for the development of the LARC model are set forth. Finally, the report addresses questions related to system costs and faculty participation. A list of LARC member institutions and a cost-analysis of Sacramento City College's Assessment Center are appended. (LL)

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Management Report

1983 - 3/4

Assessment Placement: A Design For Student Success And Institutional Planning For The 1980's

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FOREWORD

One of the many ironies of life is the fact that our strengths are often the source of our weaknesses as well. The "open door" philosophy has enabled community colleges to achieve a level of student access without parallel in the history of higher education. It has also brought to our colleges substantial numbers of students who have not yet mastered the learning skills that are essential for success in most college level courses. This dilemma is undoubtedly one of the reasons why we hear so much these days about "student assessment," a phrase that has found its way into recent publications by CPEC and the Chancellor's Office and may appear in pending legislation.

The subject of student assessment has potential implications for all educational programs and services within an institution. Managers not yet familiar with recent developments in this field will find Dr. Bray's report to be an informative introduction to student assessment. Others who already know the subject will be pleased to have this account of those developments in a single document.

Ray Liedlich
Columbia College

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dorothy Bray is Assistant Dean for the Division of Languages and Literature at Sacramento City College. She has been one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the original LARC-North (the Learning Assessment Retention Consortium), which has developed into a statewide network of colleges over the past year; and she currently serves as President of that organization.

A specialist in learning theory, Dr. Bray has been active in curriculum development for a number of California community colleges, and has made presentations at both state and national conferences on assessment, retention, and basic skills issues. She served on the Advisory Committee for the CPEC Remediation Study and is an ex-officio member of the CACC Commission on Instruction.

ASSESSMENT/PLACEMENT: A DESIGN FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING FOR THE 1980'S

Dorothy Bray
Assistant Dean, Sacramento City College
President, LARC Consortium

A new design for student success has become the focal point of discussion, planning and action in the California Community Colleges. They are examining the uses of assessment to provide data on the learning needs of students, to direct and to place students in appropriate levels of classes and to establish a system of accountability for student learning and retention. The emphasis is on a more systematic assessment of basic skills as part of a placement process.

Improving learning and increasing retention have become key issues for colleges whose open doors have attracted many students who are underprepared to do college work. A National Institute of Education Report on Community College Literacy, coordinated by John Roueche and written by Dr. Suanne D. Roueche of the University of Texas, describes the nature of the learning and remediation problems of students today.

The Roueche study defines the extent of the remediation problem. It reports that nationally, more than half of the students now entering community colleges read below the 8th grade level, a decline of at least two levels since 1971. Of this half, a majority are reading below the 5th grade level.

Another learning problem centers around the diversity of students and wide range of academic levels present in community college classes. K. Patricia Cross (1981) said that this range of differences increases by approximately one grade level each year. A third grade teacher might have a range of three grades in one class, a sixth grade teacher, six grade levels, and a community college instructor might have a potential span of 12 grades in one class. This is not a range that any classroom teacher knows how to deal with and a problem that makes remediation an essential part of the community college program and that makes teaching in the traditional way almost impossible.

A recent survey by TIME (January 11, 1982) describes the dilemma of the underprepared student as epidemic in postsecondary institutions and cites the following examples:

1. A study of the University of California found that between 1977 and 1980 only half of 50,000 students could demonstrate reading and writing skills necessary for college level courses.

2. At Ohio State University, 42% of this Fall's entering freshmen were required to take at least one remedial course in English or Math.

A 1982 report by the California Postsecondary Education Commission describes remedial learning problems in California's colleges:

- The proportion of enrollments in remedial reading and writing courses has remained virtually constant at 45% of the enrollments in all English courses over the last three years.

- Students in mathematics courses defined as remedial by the Commission's survey account for over half of the students in all mathematics courses.

- ESL enrollments have increased 77% in three years.

- Fifty percent of the California State University students who have taken the English Placement Test since its inception in 1977 need remedial assistance before entering a freshmen composition course.

The issue of retention is usually discussed in negative terms of attrition. For example, a study in California completed in 1980 (Rasor) estimated that 2.5 million dollars in state funds were lost in revenue with dropouts. In this study 30% of the students polled dropped courses because they were too difficult. Most studies indicate that attrition of students at the community colleges is at about the 50% level.

In this rapidly changing academic and social environment, new themes are guiding educational actions. The major theme of the 1960's and 1970's was to provide access to college for all students who could benefit from instruction. The major theme of the 1980's is to develop the skills considered necessary for academic and job success. The theme of learning is predominant and accountability for this learning is a mandate for both students and colleges. A relationship between the student and the college has emerged that calls for skills competencies to be developed and levels of achievement to be demonstrated.

Many California Community Colleges have begun to adopt a model that places activities related to assessment/placement in the forefront of institutional plans. The terms assessment/placement increasingly are being used to refer to a dual process that (1) assesses the skills levels of students, and (2) uses that information to advise, define, and direct the educational plan and progress of the students.

There is a great deal of diverse activity in assessment. The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC)

Remediation study described the nature of diagnostic testing and assessment in a 1982 report. Among the 101 Community Colleges that responded to the Commission's survey, the majority provide mandatory diagnostic testing in writing (59.4%), and voluntary testing in reading (56.4%) and in mathematics (55.4%). Forty-four percent of the colleges offer mandatory testing and 30% provide voluntary assessment in English as a Second Language.

According to this study, diagnostic testing and assessment of students' basic skills deficiencies in the Community Colleges ranges from nonexistent at one college to a sophisticated testing system in mathematics, reading, and writing at another which gives students information not only about their test scores but also about entry level classes for which they are eligible and ineligible. Great diversity exists as well in the testing instruments used, the populations tested, and the reasons for testing, be it for diagnosis, course placement, course entry, prerequisite fulfillment, or graduation proficiency. These activities in assessment reflect the need to incorporate assessment/placement as an integral college resource and raise the question of how this can be accomplished.

A Consortium of 17 colleges in Northern California has been organized to act on this issue. Based on the premise that an assessment/placement system can provide the framework for improving learning and the retention of students, the Consortium has adopted the acronym LARC--the Learning, Assessment, Retention Consortium. An organization just over a year old, this Consortium is soon to include 60 colleges statewide. The member institutions are listed in (Appendix A). These colleges have examined emerging problems related to assessment and basic skills and have designed and implemented specific action plans for institutional response.

LARC provides a network of individual colleges which addresses problems collectively. A steering committee of representatives from member colleges acts on specific issues and coordinates activities. Some action plans include the following: (1) Three workshops were conducted in 1981-82 with an average of 120 faculty-staff participation per workshop. These workshops featured review of emerging information on the problems, concerns and potential solutions to the assessment and retention problems faced by the colleges. (2) A model was developed to assist colleges in implementing an Assessment/ Placement System. (3) A data base was formed with twelve colleges initially contributing. By Spring, 1983 approximately sixty colleges will be contributing data. (4) The findings of the LARC research and workshops were published in a Program Guide which contains the research data base, other information, and descriptions of Assessment/Placement programs and learning skills courses/programs of the participating colleges. Over 1,000 copies of the Guide have been disseminated to faculty and administrators throughout California. (5) In November, 1982 the Consortium colleges co-sponsored with the California

Association of Community Colleges a Charrette Workshop which clarified existing terminology related to remedial-developmental courses. Over 140 participants in this workshop produced recommendations regarding key concepts of remedial and developmental education in California. (6) A Research Handbook for the Development and Evaluation of Assessment/Placement Programs is being designed by a research subcommittee and will be available for Consortium colleges in Spring, 1983. A grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Instruction (Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges) is providing funding for some of the activities.

Strategic Planning. Questions of implementation, impact, and cost that are central for college planning include the following:

- What is an assessment/placement system?
- What are examples of assessment/placement systems currently in use?
- How is an assessment/placement system implemented?
- What are some of the costs to be considered in implementing assessment/placement?
- How does assessment affect faculty?
- What are issues of assessment/placement? How can they be dealt with?

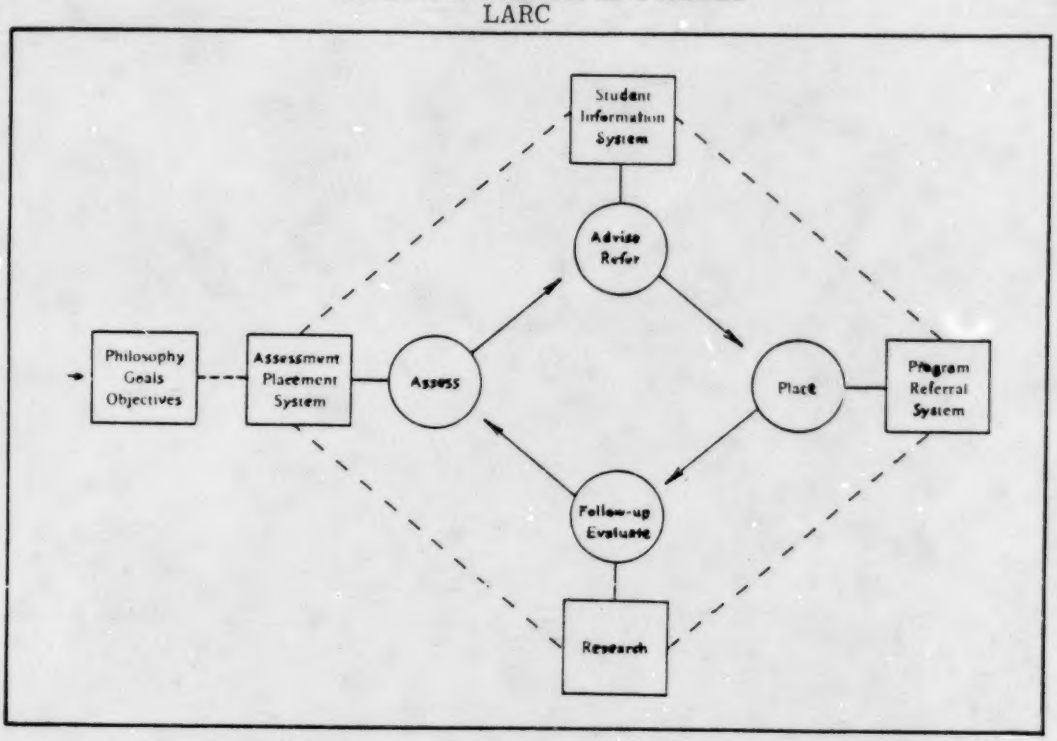
Assessment Beyond Testing. The need for a new, broader definition of assessment, neutral from the negative feelings about testing from the last decade, has led to the development of a more comprehensive concept of assessment. In the past students were tested and sent to existing courses. Little emphasis was placed on designing courses that would meet the needs that students demonstrated on the tests. Thus testing was an isolated activity often with negative implications.

Assessment in the LARC model goes beyond testing; it has a close relationship to courses and programs. The objectives of assessment/placement are course and instruction related: (1) successful student performance in class, (2) successful completion of courses, (3) student satisfaction, and (4) improved teaching and learning. As viewed here, assessment together with more effective teaching and learning strategies helps achieve the desired result of retention.

A Comprehensive Assessment/Placement System. A model designed by the LARC Consortium describes assessment/placement to be four activities that involve all segments of the college. Each of the four activities of assessment, advisement, placement and follow-up has an information system: (1) Based on an assessment/placement system, students are assessed. (2) Based on a student information system, students are advised. (3) Based

on a program referral system, students are placed in courses, and (4) Based on a research system, student progress is followed up and evaluated. The LARC Assessment/Placement Model shown here describes the relationship of these four activities.

ASSESSMENT/PLACEMENT MODEL
LARC



Types of Assessment/Placement Systems. There is no single best way to organize for assessment activities. Three organizational types of assessment are described in the LARC Survey information from twelve colleges. Each system reflects a relationship between assessment and the program providing skills instruction. (1) Assessment Center models are becoming common where all testing is centralized and different course levels are provided within the regular class structure. Sacramento City College's Assessment Center model has been in operation for four years and is an example of this model. (2) The Learning Skills Model, used by San Joaquin Delta College, reflects a centralized approach to developmental education which is within a Division of Developmental Education. An integrated-interdisciplinary approach is exemplified by Chabot, Valley Campus, where task

forces guide and direct programs and faculty coordinators oversee the basic skills areas. Emphasis is on faculty working on integrating related skills such as reading and writing into classroom instruction.

At the CACC (California Association of Community Colleges) Conference in November, 1982, seven other colleges described their assessment models and programs. These seven colleges with distinctive assessment programs include: Cerritos College, Fullerton College, Modesto College, Palomar College, Santa Ana College, Victor Valley College and Yuba College. A research study sponsored by Yuba College, to be completed in May, 1983, will provide a comprehensive review of assessment/placement models throughout the state (Rounds, Research Study, 1983).

Implementing an Assessment/Placement System. A Fall, 1982, report of the activities of the LARC Consortium colleges who are implementing such systems describes the kinds of institutional decisions that need to be made. The decisions described here did not occur necessarily in this order since individual colleges worked according to their own institutional needs and calendars. During 1981-82 the LARC colleges acted on the following:

- Developed a philosophy of assessment/placement
- Developed goals and objectives related to assessment/placement
- Established assessment centers
- Added classes to accommodate skills needs of students
- Assessed students
- Selected tests; added additional tests as needed
- Developed campus committees for assessment/ placement/learning

One of the major concerns in establishing an effective assessment program is determining which instrument to use and for what purposes. The LARC survey found a great variety of tests were used by the colleges and many colleges were using locally designed tests. Which test to use, and how to use the test results are key questions being considered as colleges implement assessment programs.

In establishing an assessment/placement system, colleges need to consider a variety of details and decisions. The following chart, taken from the LARC Program Guide, describes who, what, and how questions that have guided the development of the assessment/ placement systems of the LARC colleges.

CHART IV

LARC CONSORTIUM

ASSESSMENT/PLACEMENT MODEL
Guidelines for the Development of an Assessment/Placement System

FUNCTIONS	WHO	WHAT	HOW
Assess	Who will be assessed? Who will do the assessing?	1. What basic skills areas will be assessed and used to determine placement? 2. What tests will be used? 3. What will be the cut-off scores for placement? 4. What alternatives to standardized tests will be available?	How will an assessment/placement system differ from a diagnostic system? How will one use an assessment/placement system? How will the system be able to screen large numbers rapidly and inexpensively? How and where will testing take place?
Advise	Who will do the advising? Who will be administratively responsible?	What are advising needs? What is the relationship of the advisory system to other support services?	How should advisory services be delivered? How should advisors be selected and trained? How do you unify placement and infor-Information?
Place	Who will determine available programs? Who will place?	What courses will be available for skills placement? What minimum skill competencies are needed to succeed in course?	How many courses and levels will be available?
Follow-up and Evaluation	Who will conduct follow-up studies?	What type of program evaluation will be conducted? What student progress information will be available?	How will one adjust placement as needed?

Costs of Assessment/Placement. A central question is how much will an assessment/placement system cost? Little information has been gathered at this time about the costs of assessment/placement since systems vary from college to college. Spending for assessment is reported to be as little as five dollars per student to as much as ten thousand dollars for start-up costs. Cost depends on the type of program desired. According to Dr. J. Terence Kelly, Miami Dade Community Colleges, Florida, spent $400,000 to start their very own comprehensive assessment/placement program.

A cost analysis should include four types of expenses specific to assessment activities: (1) test administration, (2) test processing, (3) test analysis and dissemination, and (4) data processing. Interpretation of the data and dissemination to students appears to be a high cost factor. The general need is for a system that can screen large numbers rapidly and inexpensively. Costs of the Sacramento City College Assessment Center are described in Appendix B.

Financing assessment/placement activities is a real concern for colleges since no additional resources are likely to be available. Budgeting for assessment/placement has to be recognized by policy makers as an added cost for colleges. The financial gain from increased retention has the potential to offset some of the expenditures. One study in Los Angeles by Dr. Glenna Scheer, Los Angeles Community College District, appears to show that a three percent change in retention is worth approximately $180,000 in savings to an institution.

Assessment and Faculty Participation. Assessment can provide a focal point for total college participation in a strategy to improve student success. Assessment is the business of the total college and involving the total college in assessment may require an analysis of staff expertise and the organizational realities at the institution.

The LARC Consortium urges a total institutional effort and uses college teams to promote an all-college effort. This team with broad faculty and management participation, reviews research data, participates in workshops, gathers information to share and prepares a college plan applying assessment/placement to curriculum, staff development, and budget. The college team is usually anchored in existing college committee structure. This team approach, composed of people with a variety of expertise and interests, links models and research directly to instructional plans and classroom instruction. A research study on student retention emphasized that the appointment of an all-college committee or task force will have a positive impact on retention. (Beal, 1980)

Assessment: A Continuing Issue and Emerging Mandate. The terms assessment/placement have become key references in California

statewide strategic planning. The questions and issues have passed from philosophical ones to implementation strategies as assessment/ placement activities are being considered by the Board of Governors, by CPEC, and by individual colleges.

The LARC Consortium has examined problems related to learning skills needs and has designed specific assessment action plans for institutional response. The Consortium, too, has been proactive in placing issues related to learning skills and assessment/ placement before regional, state, and national organizations as well as individual institutions. The activities of these colleges have provided definition and focus with an Assessment/ Placement Model. The Consortium colleges, each proceeding according to its own student needs but with a shared cooperative plan developed by consensus, has demonstrated the importance of a shared voice of many colleges speaking on key issues and using that voice to design and implement an assessment plan for student success in community colleges.

APPENDIX A

MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

LARC North

American River College
Butte Community College District
California Association of Community Colleges
California Community Colleges
Chabot College, Valley Campus
Columbia College
Cosumnes River College
Laek Tahoe Community College
Lassen Community College
Modesto Junior College
Napa Community College District
Sacramento City College
San Joaquin Delta College
Santa Rosa Junior College
Shasta College
Sierra College
Solano College
Yuba College

Bay/East Bay LARC

City College of San Francisco
College of Alameda
Contra Costa College
Diablo Valley College
Feather River College
Laney College
Los Medanos College
Merritt College
Ohlone College

Central Coast LARC

Allan Hancock College
Antelope Valley College
Bakersfield College
Cuesta College
Moorpark College
Oxnard College
Santa Barbara College
Taft College
Ventura College

South Bay/Coast LARC

Cabrillo College
College of San Mateo
Evergreen Valley College
Foothill College
Gavilan College
Hartnell College
Monterey Peninsula College
San Jose City College
Skyline College
West Valley College

LARC South

Cerritos College
El Camino College
Fullerton College
Golden West College
Grossmont College
Mt. San Antonio College
Palomar College
Rio Hondo College
Saddleback College
Santa Ana College
Santa Monica College
Southwestern College

APPENDIX B

FINANCING AN ASSESSMENT CENTER

Barry Tucker
Dean of Student Services
Sacramento City College

The initial stages (1978) of financing Sacramento City College's Assessment Center were enhanced by obtaining practically total institutional support and effort for this endeavor. The following represents a brief outline of that process:

1. Top level administrative sanction.

2. Broad based committees discussed the issues.

3. Used the data collected from the various committees, detailed reports and requests of additional funds were disseminated to the budget committee. The budget committee comprised of administrators, faculty and staff voted to fund most of the requests.

4. Created a follow-up process which increased the possibilities of obtaining VEA, EOPS and other categorical funds.

The specific costs have varied over the years, but essentially there were four general types of expenses. The range of costs and areas is listed below:

1. Supplies - $2,500 to $5,500

   a. Test Booklets
   b. Scoring Coupons
   c. Answer Sheets
   d. Pencils
   e. Duplicating (Includes Research)

2. Student Help - (8:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.) - $5,500 to $9,500 - EOPS, VEA and Block Grant Funds were used.

3. Personnel

   a. Counselors
   b. Clerk II

4. Equipment - $3,000 to $7,500

It is important to note that the initial assessment process was accomplished without the aid of a data processing phase; therefore, the information-retrieval process was very time consuming and perhaps, more expensive. For example, once computerized the student help expenses will be reduced by fifty percent (50%), but the information disseminated will be more efficient. The personnel currently operating the Assessment Center consists of a Counselor-Coordinator, 1.5 Technicians, Clerk II and Student Help. Additional personnel may be needed dependent on the extent of the research task which has been found to be an integral part of the assessment process.

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